

Late Bulb Meeting Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh 2010



This year the event moved from its long time home in Dundee to the Lecture room of the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh.

It was held as a joint event by the SRGC and the

RBGE and was open to members and friends as well as RHS members. This meant that the audience was drawn from a wider pool than it has been until now. This year there was no show of bulbous plants or alpines as is usual. This was mainly due to confusion on our part as to whether outside plants would be welcome in the RBG. Next year we will have a display of bulbs and rock plants in flower.

This day was different, in that the talks were specific to one country, namely Turkey. We all know that many of the bulbs which we grow and show are native to Turkey and that in our hearts we all would like to wander through meadows of Crocuses or gaze at scrub land peppered with red Tulips. As a bulb day then, the subjects addressed were eminently suitable. Our speaker was Professor Adil Guner from the Botanic Garden in Istanbul. The morning started with a warm welcome from **David Ray**, Director of Horticulture at the RBG, who spoke of the links between the Garden, its staff and the SRGC and of how events such as this were to our mutual benefit. David then mentioned the links between the RBGE with Turkey and the Istanbul Botanic Garden. Edinburgh University's links with Turkey reach back to the time of the late, well respected botanist, Peter Davis, author of *The Flora of Turkey*. His name and the initials PD echo through rock gardens and seed lists. In more recent times there seem to have been many exchange visits of staff to each other's gardens.

David gave a brief description of the **Nezahat Gökyiğit** Botanik Bahçesi [Istanbul Botanic Garden] and then introduced its curator, **Professor Adil Guner**.



Professor Guner described the garden's situation as 'on useless land in a motorway intersection on the Asian side of Istanbul in a residential area'. This was land for which no other person could envisage a use. Adil and his allies spotted its potential and view the motorways as assets to speed visitors to the garden rather than as obstacles. He has obviously been proved right. The garden is mainly privately funded. It has a mission statement '*to investigate the world of plants, to introduce and maintain them.*'

The garden benefits the people of Istanbul firstly by its presence and then with its beautiful plantings. It will emphasise the importance of protecting the environment by means of a beautiful educational garden, forming a green lung in the city. A botanic garden is a new concept in Turkey.



As we know, Turkey has very rich and varied plant population which the new Botanic Garden will highlight. It will promote its well documented collections and use them in education. It will maintain biological diversity and protect and propagate endemic, rare and endangered native plants. It will explore, exhibit and preserve the cultural heritage of economic or useful plants and their connections and relationships with people.



A particularly modern and important objective is to investigate the growing of drought resistant crops to help counter desertification. Water is a precious resource especially in hot countries with low rainfall, like those in the Middle east. Irrigation helps for a while but eventually salts build up in the soil and it is no longer productive. Istanbul garden is testing halophyllic plants to see which will grow in these 'used and now unusable' areas. In time it is hoped to produce crop plants which are more tolerant of the harsh conditions. Adil emphasised that plants are essential to guarantee life on earth and everyone need to learn about the importance of plants. They run educational programmes.



Dry garden





In time, the garden will build up a reference library. Even now, the garden is an important resource in Istanbul whether considered from the educational or from the social point of view. The range of plants grown there which also grow in British gardens is surprising.

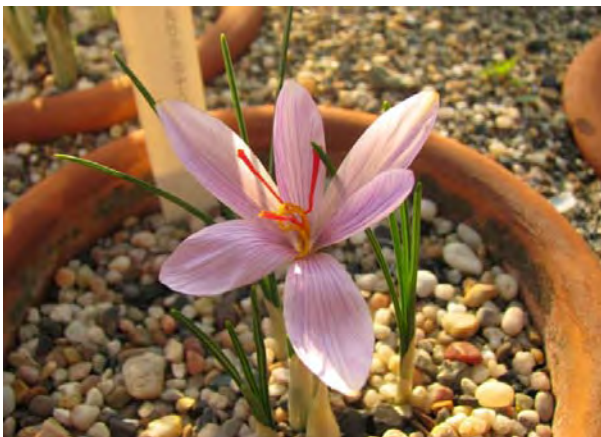
Some Bulbs in the garden [Pictures from the Istanbul BG web site]

Top Bulbs in clay pots in open plunge beds



Below *Crocus oreoreticus* [L],

Cr. sativus [R]





Crocus nerimaniae

Tony Goode wrote in the SRGC Forum 'in the UK it is accorded full species status rather than subspecies status. From the little I know it has affinities with *C wattiorum* and of course both are in series *biflori* which links them closely to *Crocus biflorus*'.



Colchicum baytopiorum

is named for the Turkish botanists Turhan Baytop, who died in 2002, and his wife, Asuman Baytop. It is native to dense scrub in Turkey's western Antalya province. This also grows in the bulb frame in RBGE.

We think of Turkey as a hot country and it is in summer but it also has some very cold weather. Even Istanbul gets snow.



After the first lecture we had time to see round Edinburgh's jewel. We were divided into, or formed into groups to be shown round the garden. Some of us did not get further than the seats in front of the big greenhouses. There, we indulged in the customary SRGC habit of chatting with friends in the sunshine. We visited the alpine house which as usual was full of treasures. Then it was time for lunch. This is what we paid for! Everything else was FREE! Good old SRGC. Lunch was a superb buffet of fresh fruit, sandwiches, Indian snacks, Chinese rolls & dips, with red or white wine or apple or orange juice. We also had coffee and biscuits in the morning! More time to talk, this time with our mouths full. This excellent 'spread' was organised by the RBGE. It's worth going just for the food!



September lunchtime in the RBGE

Colchicum en masse at RBGE

photos in RBG Edinburgh by Sandy Leven



Colchicum byzantinum



Colchicum autumnale



Allium wallichianum is a powerful bulb holding its large umbels on strong triangular stems. It is from the Himalayas. The RBG had 3 or 4 forms [according to their labels], with flowers varying from this bluey purple to nice rose purple and a cracking deep maroon one.



Leucojum autumnale [above]

In the afternoon we learned about the history of gardening in Turkey.

Do you remember the Tulip inflation, the bubble and burst in Holland? TV series in the 1950's 'The Black Tulip'. Tulip cultivation and tulip mania started in Ottoman times or before in Turkey! Centuries ago Turkish gardeners cultivated many bulbs which we still grow today. Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul are magical names which conjure up previous civilisations. Hittites, Alexander the Great, the Greeks and Romans all ruled over Turkey at one time or another. My granpa was there in World War 1! [he exhibited very few horticultural traits]. We were shown bulb flowers incorporated into porcelain, tiles, tapestries and carpets. Traditional methods of growing them looked like our Tudor formal box edged gardens where bright flowers were used as splashes of colour inside formal box defined patterns. Some of the planting at the Istanbul garden harked back to those times.



Ottoman tiles and tapestries



Ottoman plates 15th century



Ottoman jugs



We left Edinburgh knowing much more about Islamic art and the use of flowers, especially tulips in design. We appreciated **Professor Adil Guner's** coming over to talk to us. One day we may get to Istanbul to see this garden in the motorway intersection in Istanbul. A special place where East meets west, city meets countryside and plants from all over the world but especially from Turkey are grown, studied and treasured.

The next SRGC event at the RBGE
is the Scottish Snowdrop Gala on
February 18th 2011

The following day, 19th February
2011, is the Early Bulb Display and
Lectures in Dunblane